



## New England Fishery Management Council

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Eric Reid, *Chair* | Thomas A. Nies, *Executive Director*

### MEETING SUMMARY

#### Scallop Plan Development Team

February 7, 2023

Webinar Meeting

The Scallop PDT met via webinar on February 7, 2023 to: 1) discuss updates on recent Council business (i.e., Framework 36, NGOM control date); 2) review the list of 2023 scallop work priorities, including an introduction of possible modifications to the Scallop RSA program and the outlook for development of a joint Habitat and Scallop action that will consider fishery access to the Northern Edge HMA; and 3) discuss other business.

#### ***MEETING ATTENDANCE:***

Jonathon Peros (Plan Coordinator), Sam Ascii, Adam Delargy, Danielle Palmer, Dave Rudders, Bill DuPaul, Jessica Blaylock, Kelly Whitmore, Naresh Pradhan, Rachel Feeney, Chris Parkins, Sharon Benjamin, Shannah Jaburek, Dvora Hart, Tasha O'Hara, Carl Huntsberger. Committee Chair Melanie Griffin also attended, along with approximately 17 members of the public listening in on the call.

The meeting began at 9:33 am. Council staff welcomed Shannah Jaburek (NMFS-GARFO), Tasha O'Hara (CFF), and Carl Huntsberger (Maine DMR) to the PDT, and thanked Carl Wilson (Maine DMR) for his service. Following introductions, staff reviewed the agenda for the meeting.

#### **2023 Scallop Work Priorities Discussion**

Council staff provided an overview of the work priorities that were identified for the scallop fishery management plan by the Council for the 2023 calendar year (Table 1). There were no questions or discussion on the presentation.

Table 1 – 2023 work priorities for the scallop fishery management plan.

Scallop Priorities
Prepare a specifications package to set FY 2024 (2025 default) specifications (i.e. setting DAS, access area trips, Northern GOM TAL, limited access general category IFQ allocations, etc.).
Complete ongoing actions (Framework 36)
The Scallop and Habitat Committees will develop an action for access to Northern Edge HMA, including development of access area program for modified area
Modify RSA program as recommended by RSA Program Review, which includes implementing recommendations from the Sea Scallop Survey Working Group
5-Year LAGC IFQ program review (2016 to 2022)
Management track assessment (read SAMS model review – agreed this would not be a management track for several reasons)
NMFS and PDT have annual responsibilities related to estimating scallop, yellowtail, and windowpane catch during the year (i.e. LA AM exception, re-evaluation of YT sub-ACL based on updated information).
Support annual scallop RSA process, including priority setting, and technical and management reviews.
Research track assessment (working group participation)

### Modifying Scallop RSA Program Discussion

Council staff introduced the 2023 work priority “Modify Research Set-Aside (RSA) program as recommended by RSA Program Review, which includes implementing recommendations from the Sea Scallop Survey Working Group (SSWG)”, with a focus on exploring longer-term survey awards of up to five years. Both the RSA program review and SSWG recommended that the Council and NMFS consider the utility of longer term awards for survey grants. Council staff explained that this would likely occur in a two-step process, beginning with a letter to NMFS requesting information on the feasibility and legal requirements to revise the RSA program to allow for longer-term awards of up five years. A member of the PDT and SSWG co-chair noted that part of longer-term award discussion was around transitioning to an effort based survey system, where awards are structured around a general survey domain and set number of survey effort units over a longer time period and suggested that these elements be considered as the conversation moves forward. Another suggestion from the PDT was to consider vessel safety requirements in the discussion around longer term collaborative research efforts. Council staff also explained that the Scallop Committee would likely review survey guiding principals developed by the SSWG, and that Council could consider approving them in April.

### Northern Edge Discussion

Council staff provided an overview of the 2023 work priority “The Scallop and Habitat Committees will develop an action for access to Northern Edge HMA, including development of access area program for modified area”, including background information on development of the Northern Edge habitat area of

particular concern (HAPC), habitat management area (HMA), and the proposed changes to the Northern Edge through the Council's Omnibus Habitat Amendment 2 (OHA2) that were disapproved by NMFS in 2018. The work plan for the near term includes development of goals and objectives with the Habitat PDT that may be considered by Scallop and Habitat AP and CTEs in late March and by the Council at their April 2023 meeting. The PDT discussed the following elements that should be considered as the joint action is developed:

- High intensity fishing in a small area could be problematic, and approaches to administering effort in a small, concentrated portion of the Northern Edge should be considered as the action is developed.
- The PDT should review biological samples from annual dredge surveys of the Northern Edge to better understand meat quality and yield in this area.
- An access area program for the Northern Edge will likely need to consider impacts to flatfish and other non-target stocks (i.e., monkfish, winter flounder, skates, etc.) in tandem with impacts to vulnerable habitat. For flatfish, reviewing trends in bycatch from observed trips in the Northern Flank may be a reasonable starting point to get a better understanding of seasonal bycatch trends on the Northern Edge.
- The Northern Edge has traditionally been a popular lobster fishing area. Development of an access area program will need to consider conflicts with fixed gear. Related to this, it was noted that OHA2 proposed a seasonal closure to mobile bottom tending gear (MBTG) on the Northern Edge from June 15 – October 31 to reduce conflicts between dredges/trawls and lobster gear. The PDT noted that the timing of that seasonal closure does not do much for optimizing scallop yield given that meat yield tends to be highest during the summer months.
- With regard to enforcing a small access area adjacent to vulnerable habitat, there may be additional monitoring elements that should be considered such as increasing the vessel monitoring system (VMS) ping rate.
- Another important consideration will be the timing of scallop access relative to meat yield and spawning cycles.
- The *Didemnum* tunicate is known to exist on the Northern Edge and is usually more common in fished areas compared to unfished areas. Any fishing on the Northern Edge will increase the potential for this tunicate to spread. The Observer Program may consider training at-sea observers to identify *Didemnum* so that its presence can be tracked.
- Both HabCam and the SMAST drop camera collect information on substrate type and epifaunal growth. These data could be useful in identifying higher complexity and lower complexity areas within in the Northern Edge HMA.
- The PDT should catalogue the state of knowledge related to the importance of scallops in the Northern Edge HMA to downstream recruitment. Past larval transport work suggests that larvae from the Northern Edge could move halfway around Georges Bank before settling, which means scallops on the Northern Edge could have been responsible for recruitment events observed in the Southern Flank and Nantucket Lightship regions. It was noted that Dr. Chen (SMAST) has looked at larval transport on Georges Bank in recent years. The tradeoff between harvesting scallops on the Northern Edge and potentially affecting spawning potential will be an important consideration moving forward.

The PDT will provide input on the draft list of Goals and Objectives for the joint action through correspondence in advance of a joint meeting between the Scallop and Habitat PDTs in mid-March.

## Other Business

No other business was discussed. The meeting adjourned at 11:10 AM.